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SUBJECT: MALIANS REPORTEDLY ARREST KIDNAPPING SUSPECTS NEAR
GAO

REF: BAMAKO 00135

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(S) Summary: On March 18-19 Kidal Chamber of Commerce president Abdousalam ag Assalat told the Embassy that Malian State Security had arrested two individuals in connection with the January 22 kidnapping of four European tourists near the northern Malian town of Anderamboukane. One of those arrested is reportedly Mahama ag Assarid, a Chamanamas Tuareg who was previously identified as one those likely involved in the Europeans' disappearance. Ag Assalat also reported that senior Chamanamas Tuareg leaders, including Minister of Environment Aghatam ag Alassane, were putting significant pressure on the Malian government to release both suspects. End Summary.

2.(S) Abdousalam ag Assalat told the Embassy on March 18 that Malian security services had arrested Mahama ag Assarid about 40 km east of Gao. Ag Assalat and other Tuareg contacts have implicated Ag Assarid, previously identified as only "Mohamed", and two other Tuaregs, Inteweka ag Ahmayed (aka Ousmane) and Tibla ag Tinfane, in the kidnapping of four European tourists along the Mali-Niger border in January 2009. According to ag Assalat, ag Assarid was using the false name Ibrahim ag Moussa when he was arrested by Malian authorities. Ag Assalat added that senior Chamanamas Tuareg leaders, including Minister of Environment ag Alassane, were already pressuring the Malian government to release ag Assarid, claiming that Tuaregs had nothing to do with hostage taking or AQIM.

3.(S) On March 19 ag Assalat told the Embassy that Malian authorities had in fact arrested two individuals. The second individual is named Sidamar and is a local leader of Chamanamas Tuaregs in the Gao area. Since there are several Chamanamas Tuaregs named Sidamar, we do not know who this individual is or why he may have been arrested. His apparent status within the Chamanamas community may help to explain the mobilization of Chamanamas leaders to effectuate his and ag Assarid's rapid release.

4.(S) The arrest, and ag Assalat's immediate knowledge of it, was not all that surprising given that ag Assalat and renowned Tuareg trafficker Merzouk ag Acherif previously told the Embassy that Kidal Tuaregs were working on a plan to apprehend some of those suspected of kidnapping the four European tourists near the northern Malian town of Anderamboukane (Ref. A). During the week of March 9 ag Assalat reported that Merzouk had "secretly" moved to Gao to help track Asultan ould Badi, another northern Mali trafficker and AQIM facilitator who is often linked to those responsible for kidnapping two Canadian diplomats in Niger in December 2009.

5.(S) Comment: Arresting individuals suspected of being

involved in the European and Canadian kidnappings is perhaps one of the most direct and effective ways to prevent similar incidents in the future. If ag Assalat's information proves correct and Mahama ag Assarid was indeed one of the two individuals picked up by Malian authorities, releasing him before attempting to fully ascertain whether ag Assarid was indeed involved in the Anderamboukane kidnappings would send the opposite message - that one can kidnap individuals and sell them to AQIM with impunity in northern Mali.

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